

VZCZCXR09909
PP RUEHGR
DE RUEHWN #0021/01 0111433
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 111433Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5984
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1854
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0285
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 0142
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J5 MIAMI FL
RUEHCV/USDAO CARACAS VE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRIDGETOWN 000021

SIPDIS

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL CN TW BB XL

SUBJECT: BARBADOS ELECTION UNPREDICTABLE TO THE END

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: With elections scheduled for January 15, the Barbados political landscape has heated up with accusations flying between the two main parties, the launch of their political manifestos, and the increased vigor of on-the-ground canvassing and media campaigning. Statistically, the opposition party appears to have a slight edge, but this will likely be one of the hardest fought and most unpredictable elections in Barbadian history. END SUMMARY.

AND THE SURVEY SAYS...

¶2. (U) The January 11 poll by CADRES, the leading polling company in the Caribbean, shows a continual shift towards the opposition Democratic Labour Party (DLP). According to the poll's calculations, a 9.9 percent swing against the ruling Barbados Labour Party (BLP) translates into 14 more seats for the DLP, giving them 21 out of 30 seats. Also, since the October poll, opposition leader David Thompson's popularity has risen 12 percent, from 29 to 41 percent. Prime Minister Owen Arthur's popularity remains high, but has dropped slightly from 52 to 48.2 percent. Overall support for the two parties was dead even at roughly 30 percent each.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

¶3. (U) During the short campaign season leading up to the January 15 elections, the ruling BLP is primarily focusing on its successes for the last 14 years and the immeasurable popularity of its leader, PM Arthur. The campaign emphatically states that Barbados would be in safer hands if the BLP is returned to power. However, the BLP is taking jabs at its competitor as well, citing the failure of the DLP to handle economic crises during its last short stint in power (1991-4).

¶4. (U) Like the Democrats up North, the DLP is campaigning on the need for change. Key issues include the high cost of living, the quality of health care in Barbados, and the possible cost overruns on major public works, such as the highway expansion. The DLP is also attacking the BLP as corrupt and lacking integrity. A series of missteps on the part of the BLP have allowed the opposition to launch an attacking campaign, accusing the ruling party of attempting to establish a one-party state and utilizing covert surveillance and wiretapping.

PARTIES UNVEIL FIVE-YEAR PLANS

¶5. (U) The BLP manifesto primarily promises to continue tackling ongoing problems and developing current projects. Proposals include

utilizing Government lands for housing, tackling price gouging and high food prices, constructing a new state of the art hospital and National Sports Stadium, reducing taxes for middle income, instituting tax incentives to encourage the manufacture of "green" products, and establishing an Anti-Corruption Unit, Freedom of Information legislation, and a modern Corruption and Bribery Act.

16. (U) The opposition DLP has developed potential policies designed to favor the common man. These include plans to remove Value Added Tax (VAT) on building materials on houses valued up to BDS 400,000 (USD 200,000), reduce food prices and energy costs, rehabilitate the island's lone public hospital, increase pensions, lower taxes on mortgages, and provide house plots to low to middle income earners.

THE TAIWAN QUESTION

17. (SBU) With Taiwanese president Chen Shui Bian traveling to the region the week of the elections, the incumbent BLP has accused the opposition DLP party of engaging in discussions with Taiwan regarding campaign funding and a shift of allegiance from mainland China to Taiwan. The opposition DLP and the Taiwanese government have both issued statements vehemently denying these charges. (NOTE: As Barbados has maintained diplomatic ties with China since 1977, Post has no reason to believe there is merit to these charges. End Note.)

IT'S ANYONE'S GAME

18. (SBU) COMMENT: The BLP's greatest strength is Arthur's widespread popularity. However, Barbadians historically prefer to expel even

BRIDGETOWN 00000021 002 OF 002

the most popular leaders after they have been in power "too long." While opposition Leader David Thompson does not enjoy the same level of popularity, his popularity has steadily risen and the increasing sentiment for a need for change might allow the DLP to win the elections. Regardless of who wins, the victorious party will likely enter Parliament with fewer than the 23 out of 30 seats that the BLP currently enjoys. END COMMENT.

OURISMAN